

## Tackling the Stop Snitching Phenomenon

The Stop Snitching phenomenon is causing a significant problem in US cities. Criminal gangs are leading campaigns intended to instill fear in the communities in which they operate and prevent witnesses to their criminal behavior from going to the police. Such intimidation has a negative effect on law enforcement, reducing the reporting of serious crimes and cooperation with law enforcement officers investigating such crimes.

The Police Executive Research Forum (PERF) and U.S. Department of Justice published a report entitled *"The Stop Snitching Phenomenon: Breaking the Code of Silence"* in February 2009 which looks at the background to the phenomenon and potential methods for tackling it.

The report notes a FBI statistic which shows that national clearance rates for violent crime, especially homicide, have been declining since 2000 and reached 44.5 percent in 2007. This is attributed, at least in part, to growing witness intimidation.

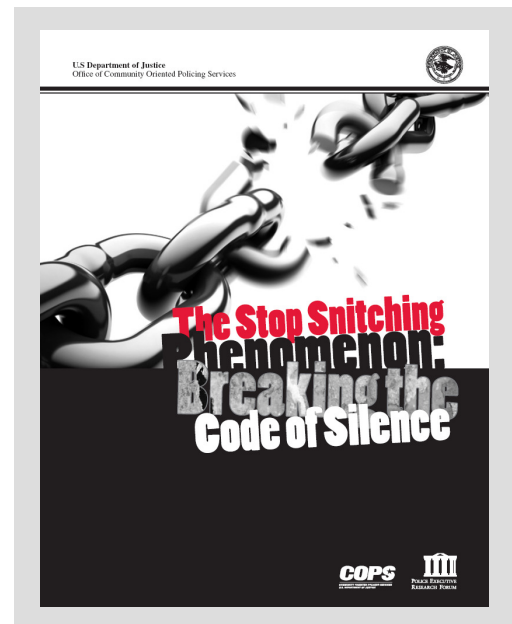
Stop Snitching messages dissuading witnesses from cooperating with the police have been around for some time. In 2004, however, the problem escalated following the release of a DVD produced in Baltimore called *"Stop Snitchin"* which aimed to frighten potential witnesses into silence. This DVD has spawned t-shirts, hats and rap lyrics threatening violence against witnesses providing information to the police.

PERF conducted a survey to measure the stop snitching phenomenon and found that 47% of police departments identified the stop snitching phenomenon as a problem.

### Why has the Stop Snitching phenomenon spread?

The report identifies four main reasons for the spread of the Stop Snitching phenomenon:

1. Lack of trust in police departments - citizens not trusting police departments to deal with witnesses in a satisfactory way.
2. Fear that police cannot protect witnesses from retaliation - a perception that police departments have neither the resources nor the ability to be able to provide adequate protection.



3. A “blue wall of silence” in police departments - citizens perceive that police officers have their own code of silence when fellow officers abuse their powers. In light of this environment, police officers are discouraged by the hypocrisy of encouraging witnesses to speak.
4. Embedded culture of silence - many communities have a long-established culture of not cooperating with the police.
5. Media and celebrities - since a professional basketball player appeared in the ‘*Stop Snitchin*’ DVD in 2004, a number of other celebrities have publicly supported the Stop Snitching phenomenon, including well known rappers like Com’ron, Lil’ Kim and 50 Cent. A number of high profile cases of no-snitching have also added to the impact, such as the shooting of rapper Busta Rhyme’s bodyguard, in which not one of the 50 people who witnessed the event gave any information to the police.
6. Merchandise and publicity - as well as celebrity involvement, merchandise, such as t-shirts emblazoned with the words “Stop Snitching”, has proliferated in some areas, all adding to the visibility and physical presence of the phenomenon.

### **Recommendations for addressing the Stop Snitching phenomenon and how [abmpegasus](#) can help**

The Stop Snitching report identifies a number of ways of addressing the phenomenon. The majority of these approaches can be achieved or supported by the [abmpegasus](#) software system for managing covert policing.

1. Get the entire community involved
  - Crimestoppers  
Crimestoppers programs have the potential to improve the quality and quantity of information provided to the police. [abmpegasus Information In Confidence](#) can support this by helping law enforcement agencies to store anonymous information reliably and securely, thereby maintaining citizens’ confidence.
2. Acknowledge and deal with the fear of retaliation
  - Facilitate anonymous tips  
Citizens need to be confident that any information they provide will remain anonymous. [abmpegasus Information In Confidence](#) provides a robust system for recording and storing information provided anonymously.
  - Witness protection  
One of the key reasons that witnesses to serious crimes do not come forward is the fear of perpetrators carrying out revenge attacks. Witness Protection programs can help to overcome this fear. However, it is crucial that the Witness Protection program is properly managed. Any leak of information or procedural error has the potential to render expensive witness protection completely worthless. [abmpegasus Protected Persons](#) helps to manage the whole process surrounding witness protection and relocation.

3. Understand and address the underlying lack of trust in the police and the entire criminal justice system

- Reducing the “blue wall of silence” in police departments  
Make it harder for police officers to abuse power or partake in corrupt behavior. The [abmpegasus](#) suite includes a number of safeguard to improve management oversight of covert operations. Audit functionality makes it easy to see what every officer has been doing, making it harder for personnel to hide corrupt activity. Financial tracking improves accountability surrounding financial transactions with confidential informants and protected witnesses.

Improve respect for policing by rooting out corruption, implementing robust management processes and implementing proper IT systems to reliably and securely store confidential information. [abmpegasus](#) helps to manage all of this, reducing damaging accusations of inadequate provision of protection or failure to properly manage confidential information.

- Managing Confidential Informants  
[abmpegasus Source Management](#) is used to manage the risk surrounding the use of confidential informants – a valuable tool in the fight against organized crime - including identity management, planning and regular risk review. Confidential Informants are a controversial area that needs to be managed well to avoid embarrassing public mistakes that further erode citizens’ confidence in law enforcement agencies.

## Conclusion

The Stop Snitching phenomenon is highly damaging to the communities in which it has proliferated. It is essential that law enforcement agencies act to reduce the impact and regain the trust of public citizens.

Improving community relations, providing witness protection, and reducing of police corruption are three important ways in which trust can start to be restored and cooperation with the police improved. The [abmpegasus](#) suite can assist with all of these initiatives, helping to ensure their success and maximize the return on any investment.

Stamping out the Stop Snitching phenomenon really is a matter of life and death. When such risks are involved, you need a system you can trust to manage it.

## References

Police Executive Research Forum, 2009. *The Stop Snitching Phenomenon: Breaking the Code of Silence*. Police Executive Research Forum and U.S. Department of Justice. Available online at <http://www.cops.usdoj.gov/files/RIC/Publications/e030919195-Stop-Snitiching.pdf> [Accessed 08 March 2010]

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